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ABSTRACT

Working conditions play an important role in a school's ability to attract, develop, and retain effective teachers. Data presented here describe a number of aspects of teachers' working conditions, including workload, compensation, school and district support for teachers' professional development, school decision making, school safety, student readiness to learn, and public respect for teachers. Results of the study revealed: (1) teachers put in more than a 40-hour week, on average, counting time spent outside of school; (2) average salaries tend to be lower than those of many other professionals, but, adjusting for inflation, teachers' salaries increased substantially during the 1980s; (3) professional development is supported by most schools and districts; (4) more than four out of five teachers reported that they had substantial control over what they taught and the texts and materials they used, and over disciplining students; and (5) public school teachers are increasingly worried about school safety at both the elementary and secondary levels. As a group, public school teachers appear to face more difficult working conditions than private school teachers, such as larger classes and less perceived influence over important school policies. However, public school teachers earn substantially more than private school teachers on average. Conditions for public school teachers also vary depending on the school's size and location, and the percentage of low income students in the school. (Contains 24 references.) (ND)

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Findings from

THE CONDITION OF EDUCATION 1996

NO. 7

TEACHERS' WORKING CONDITIONS

ED 406 348

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Teachers' Working Conditions

To deliver high quality education, schools must attract, develop, and retain effective teachers. Working conditions play an important role in a school's ability to do so. Schools that are able to offer their teachers a safe, pleasant, and supportive working environment and adequate compensation are better able to attract and retain good teachers and motivate them to do their best. Teachers' working conditions are important to students as well as teachers because they affect how much individual attention teachers can give to students. Large class sizes or disruptive students, for example, can make both teaching and learning difficult.

Some aspects of teachers' working conditions go along with the job regardless of where a teacher works. For example, teacher salaries tend to be low relative to those earned by similarly qualified individuals in other professions regardless of the type or location of the school. Other aspects of teachers' working conditions, such as school safety, vary widely from school to school. Thus, in addition to being concerned about teachers' working conditions in general, we need to pay attention to the types of schools that tend to have desirable or difficult working conditions and, for equity reasons, to the characteristics of the students who attend them.

Data presented here describe a number of aspects of teachers' working conditions, including workload, compensation, school and district support for teachers' professional development, school decision making, school safety, student readiness to learn, and public respect for teachers.

Workload

Teaching workload has several dimensions, including the amount of time spent working, the number of classes taught, and the number of students in each class. The amount of time a teacher devotes to his or her job is partly self-determined, reflecting not only what the school requires or expects but also the teacher's efficiency, enthusiasm, and commitment.

- **The average amount of time a full-time teacher is required to spend at school is only about three-quarters of the teacher's work week.**

In school year 1993–94, full-time public school teachers were required to be at school for an average of 33 hours per week to conduct classes, prepare lessons, attend staff meetings, and fulfill a variety of other school-related responsibilities. The average was similar whether they worked at the elementary or secondary level.[1]

In addition to the required time at school, a full-time public school teacher worked an average of 12 additional hours per week before and after school and on weekends. Teachers spent 3 of these hours in activities involving students and 9 hours in other school-related work, such as grading papers, preparing lessons, and meeting with parents.

Full-time public school teachers in rural/small town communities spent more time, on average, than those in other community types in activities involving students. And, those in schools with relatively few low income students (5 percent or fewer students eligible for free or reduced-priced lunches) spent more time in activities involving students and also more time on other school-related activities than did those in schools with more than 40 percent low income students.

Average hours full-time teachers worked per week before and after school and on weekends: School year 1993–94

School characteristics	Total school-related	With students	Other school-related
Public	12.1	3.3	8.7
School level			
Elementary	11.0	1.7	9.2
Secondary	13.2	5.0	8.2
Urbanicity			
Central city	11.6	3.0	8.6
Urban fringe/ large town	12.4	3.1	9.4
Rural/ small town	12.1	3.7	8.4
Percent low income students			
0–5	13.3	3.8	9.5
6–20	12.9	3.7	9.2
21–40	12.1	3.5	8.7
41–100	11.0	2.7	8.3
Private	12.9	3.6	9.3

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, NCES, Schools and Staffing Survey, 1993–94 (Teacher Questionnaire).

On average, full-time private school teachers were required to be at school about an hour longer per week and spent about an hour more outside of school than their public school counterparts.[2]

In 1992, the average amount of time per year public school teachers at the primary level spent teaching (excluding other school responsibilities) in 15 countries (mostly European) was 858 hours, ranging from a low of 624 hours in Sweden to a high of 1,093 hours in the United States.[3]

- **Public school teachers tend to have larger classes than private school teachers.**

In school year 1993–94, public school teachers had an average class size of 23.2 and taught an average of 5.6 classes per day (excluding those in self-contained classrooms). The corresponding averages for private school teachers were 19.6 and 6.0, respectively.

Average class size and average number of classes per day for full-time teachers: School year 1993–94

School characteristics	Class size	Classes per day*
Public	23.2	5.6
Urbanicity		
Central city	24.1	5.5
Urban fringe/ large town	24.1	5.5
Rural/ small town	22.0	5.7
School size		
Less than 150	15.4	6.2
150–499	20.7	6.0
500–749	23.3	5.7
750 or more	24.5	5.4
Private	19.6	6.0

*Since elementary teachers do not tend to teach separate classes, only 8 percent of the teachers who responded to this question were elementary teachers, while 92 percent were secondary teachers.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, NCES, Schools and Staffing Survey, 1993–94 (Teacher Questionnaire).

Public school teachers in rural/small town areas had lower average class sizes than teachers in other community types, and those in the smallest schools (those with less than 150 students) had

lower average class sizes than those in the largest schools (those with 750 students or more).

- **Pupil-teacher ratios at the secondary level in the United States are high compared to those in other countries.**

Among 16 countries (primarily European, but also including Japan, Australia, and New Zealand), the ratio of students to teachers (full-time-equivalents) at the secondary level averaged 13.8 in public education. In the United States, the ratio averaged 16.7.[4]

Compensation

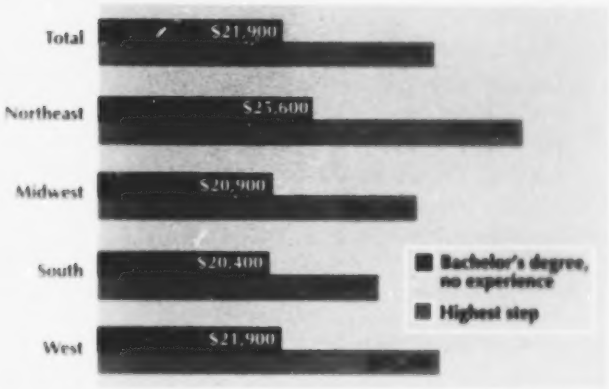
How much districts and schools pay their teachers and what criteria they use as a basis for salary increases are important aspects of teachers' working conditions. In recent years, many states and districts have been experimenting with new career paths and salary structures in an effort to attract and retain high quality teachers.

Salary Schedules

- **In school year 1993–94, public school district salaries for teachers with a bachelor's degree but no experience averaged $21,900 (in current dollars).**

Scheduled salaries for teachers usually increase with education and experience. In school year 1993–94, public school districts paid an average of $40,500 at the top of their schedules. Among private schools with salary schedules (about two-thirds of all

Average scheduled salaries (in current dollars) in public school districts: School year 1993–94



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, NCES, Schools and Staffing Survey, 1993–94 (Private School and Teacher Demand and Shortage Questionnaires).

private schools), salaries were considerably less, starting at $16,200 and rising to $27,300.[5] Regional differences in salary schedules were prominent, with public school districts in the Northeast paying the highest salaries, on average, and districts in the South generally paying the lowest salaries.

The smallest public school districts (those with less than 1,000 students) tended to pay less, especially at the higher steps of the salary schedule. Their average salary rate at the highest step on the schedule was $36,500, compared to $43,800 in the next largest district size category (1,000 to 4,999 students) and even more in larger districts.[6]

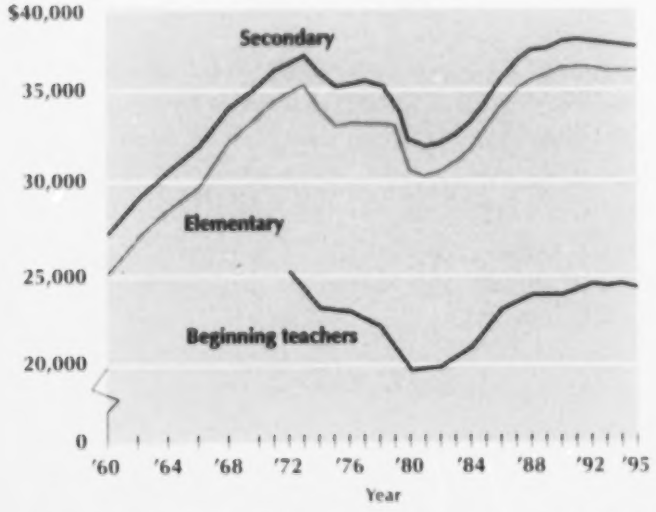
Adjusting for inflation, scheduled salary rates for teachers with a bachelor's degree but no experience declined by an average of about 4 percent in public school districts between 1987–88 and 1993–94, and rose by an average of about 2 percent in private schools.[7]

Average Salaries

- **Adjusted for inflation, average salaries for public school teachers increased substantially between 1981 and 1995.**

Following a period of decline in the 1970s, public school teachers' salaries increased throughout the 1980s and into the early 1990s, reaching a peak in 1991. In 1995, the average salary for public school teachers was $37,400, up 20 percent from $31,100 (in 1995 constant dollars) in 1981. At least some of this increase can be explained by the aging of the teacher work force. For example, between 1981 and 1991, the median number of years of teaching experience increased from 12 to 15 years.[8] Adjusting for inflation,

Average public school teacher salaries (in 1995 constant dollars)



SOURCE: American Federation of Teachers, *Survey and Analysis of Salary Trends 1995*, December 1995.

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the average salary for beginning public school teachers increased 24 percent from 1980 to 1995.[9]

- **Teachers earn less than many other college graduates with similar literacy skills; however, adjusting for inflation, education majors have fared better than other recent college graduates in terms of growth in earnings.**

In 1992, teachers had literacy skills similar to those of many other college graduates, including private-sector executives and managers, engineers, physicians, writers and artists, social workers, sales representatives, education administrators, and registered nurses. However, they often earned less. The average annual earnings for teachers (prekindergarten through secondary, public and private) employed full time were $26,000 in 1991, compared to $38,500 for all persons with a bachelor's degree who were employed full time.[10]

Among recent college graduates who majored in education and who were working full time 1 year after earning their bachelor's degree and were not enrolled in school, the median salary (in 1995 constant dollars) increased by 5 percent between 1980 and 1993. In comparison, the increase for all recent college graduates was 1 percent.[11]

- **By some salary measures, teachers in the United States are better off than teachers in other countries.**

Comparing teacher salaries meaningfully across countries requires adjusting for differences in standards of living. One way to do this is to convert salaries to purchasing power parity (PPP) rates. Using this approach, the starting and maximum salaries for public school teachers at the primary level in the United States were higher than those in most European countries in 1992.[12]

Another way to assess the status of the teaching profession in a country is to compute the ratio of teacher salaries to the per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP), an index of the economic well being of a country's population. Using this measure, starting salaries for public school teachers at the primary level in 25 countries (mostly European) were generally similar to or slightly above the country's per capita GDP (the average was 1.2); they were lowest in Sweden (0.8) and the United States (0.9).[13]

Support for Teachers' Professional Development

To provide high quality education, schools not only must hire well-qualified teachers, but also must help them improve their skills, stay current in their fields, and learn about new teaching methods. District and school support for professional development is likely to contribute to higher teacher morale and lower attrition.

- **Most schools and districts provide support for teachers to develop professionally.**

In school year 1993–94, the vast majority of full-time public school teachers participated in district- and school-sponsored workshops or in-service training, regardless of school level or community type. However, participation was a little higher at the elementary level than at the secondary level for public school teachers.

Full-time public school teachers were most commonly supported in their professional development through released time from teaching or scheduled time for professional development activities. Other types of support included professional growth credits and reimbursement of tuition, fees, or expenses. Private school teachers were less likely to receive professional growth credits and released and scheduled time from teaching than were public school teachers; however, they were more likely to receive tuition and/or fees than were their public school counterparts.[14]

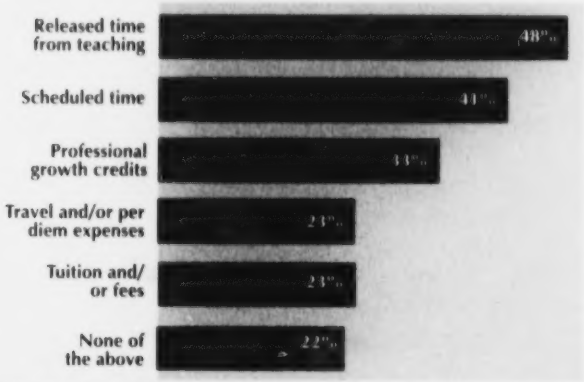
Percentage of full-time teachers who participated in district- and school-sponsored workshops or in-service training: School year 1993–94

School characteristics	Elementary Sponsored by District*	Elementary Sponsored by School	Secondary Sponsored by District*	Secondary Sponsored by School
Public	89.6	83.7	84.9	79.1
Central city	87.7	86.4	82.8	81.5
Urban fringe/ large town	91.0	83.2	84.7	78.7
Rural/ small town	89.9	82.1	86.3	78.0
Private	78.9	78.0	68.9	78.4

*For private schools, the term refers to organizations with which the school was affiliated rather than districts.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, NCES, Schools and Staffing Survey, 1993–94 (Teacher Questionnaire).

Percentage of full-time public school teachers who received professional development support: School year 1993–94



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, NCES, Schools and Staffing Survey, 1993–94 (Teacher Questionnaire).

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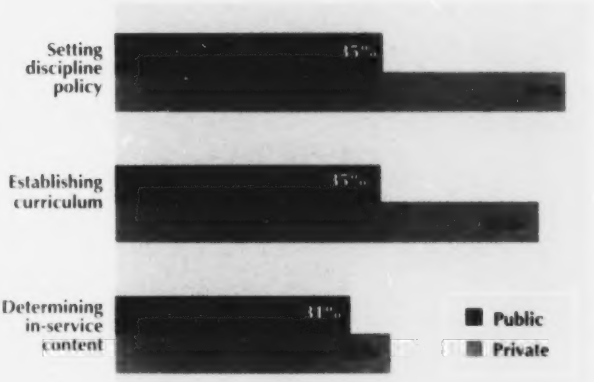
School Decision Making

The extent to which teachers participate in decisions about school policies and issues and the autonomy that teachers have in the classroom have an important effect on school climate, a critical aspect of teachers' working conditions.

Percentage of teachers who thought teachers had a good deal of influence over policies in their schools: 1993–94



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, NCES, Schools and Staffing Survey, 1993–94 (Teacher Questionnaire).

- **Teachers' perceptions of their influence over important policies in their schools vary by control of school.**

About one-third of all public school teachers thought that teachers in their school had a good deal of influence over important policies such as setting discipline policy, establishing curriculum, and determining the content of in-service programs. In each of these areas, the proportions were higher for teachers in private schools.

At both the elementary and secondary levels, teachers in public schools with relatively few low income students (5 percent or fewer students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches) were generally more likely than teachers in schools with relatively large proportions of low income students (more than 40 percent of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches) to report that teachers had a good deal of influence over their school's policies.

Teachers' perception of their influence over school policy appears to be related to school size as well. In school year 1993–94, teachers in the smallest public schools (those with less than 150 students) were generally more likely than teachers in the largest schools to think that teachers had a good deal of influence in these areas.

Percentage of public school teachers who thought teachers had a good deal of influence over their school's policies: School year 1993–94

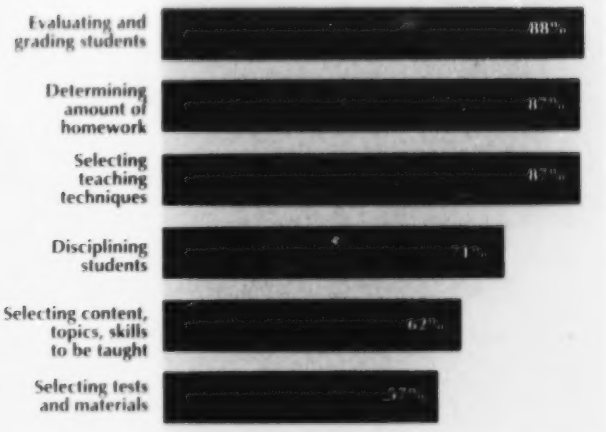
School characteristics	Discipline policy	In-service content	Establishing curriculum
Elementary	41.8	32.6	32.2
Percent low income			
5 percent or less	47.0	37.2	37.0
More than 40 percent	38.4	30.3	27.8
School size			
Less than 150	52.9	35.3	46.5
750 or more	34.4	32.3	27.7
Secondary	27.5	28.5	37.2
Percent low income			
5 percent or less	28.4	31.5	42.3
More than 40 percent	26.7	26.4	31.2
School size			
Less than 150	44.0	36.0	50.7
750 or more	23.8	27.4	33.9

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, NCES, Schools and Staffing Survey, 1993–94 (Teacher Questionnaire).

- **Teachers perceive that they have more control over some classroom practices than others.**

In school year 1993–94, the vast majority of teachers thought that they had a good deal of control in their own classroom over practices such as evaluating and grading students, selecting teaching techniques, and determining the amount of homework to be assigned. Relatively fewer felt that they had a good deal of control over disciplining students, deciding what was taught, and selecting textbooks and other instructional materials. Private school teachers were more likely to think that they had a great deal of control in each of these areas, except for determining the amount of homework.[15]

Percentage of public school teachers reporting they had a good deal of control over classroom practices: 1993–94



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, NCES, Schools and Staffing Survey, 1993–94 (Teacher Questionnaire).

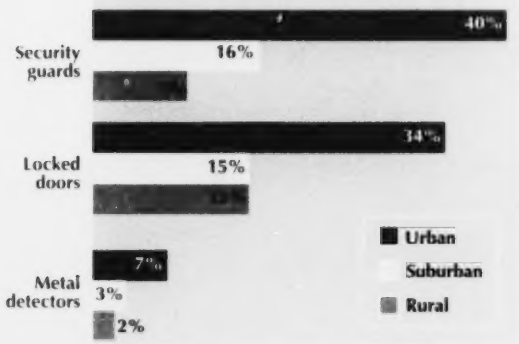
School Safety

Neither students nor teachers can perform at their best if they do not feel safe. Schools where teachers do not feel safe are likely to experience difficulty in attracting and retaining teachers. Perceptions of safety may be just as important as objective measures.

- **Some schools, especially those in central cities, find it necessary to implement security measures to protect students and staff.**

In 1993, 29 percent of children in grades 3–12 attended schools that employed security guards; 26 percent attended schools that locked the doors during the day; and 5 percent attended schools that had metal detectors. These precautions were far more common in urban areas than in other types of communities.[16]

Percentage of students in schools with various security devices: 1993

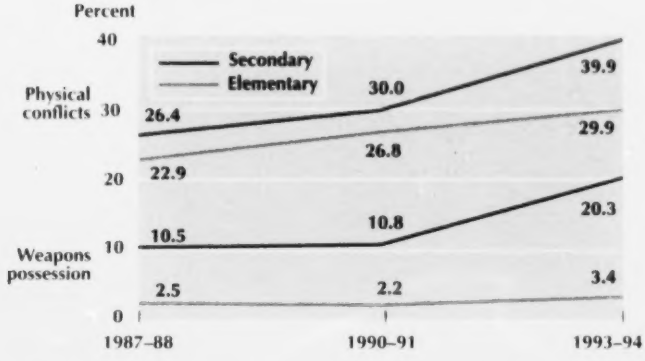


SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, NCES, National Household Education Survey (NHES), 1993, School Safety and Discipline file.

- **Increasing percentages of public school teachers are reporting that physical conflicts and weapons possession are moderate or serious problems in their schools.**

In school year 1993–94, 40 percent of public secondary teachers reported that physical conflicts among students were moderate or serious problems in their schools, up from about 30 percent just 3 years earlier. During the same period, the percentage who reported that weapons possession was a moderate or serious problem nearly doubled. Fewer elementary than secondary school teachers reported these problems as moderate or serious, but the percentage reporting physical conflicts as a moderate or serious problem grew between 1987–88 and 1993–94.

Percentage of public school teachers reporting physical conflicts among students and weapons possession as moderate or serious problems in their schools



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, NCES, "How Safe Are the Public Schools: What Do Teachers Say?" *Issue Brief*, April 1996.

Overall, 15 percent of high school seniors in 1992 reported that they were threatened at school some time during the first semester. The percentages were about the same regardless of

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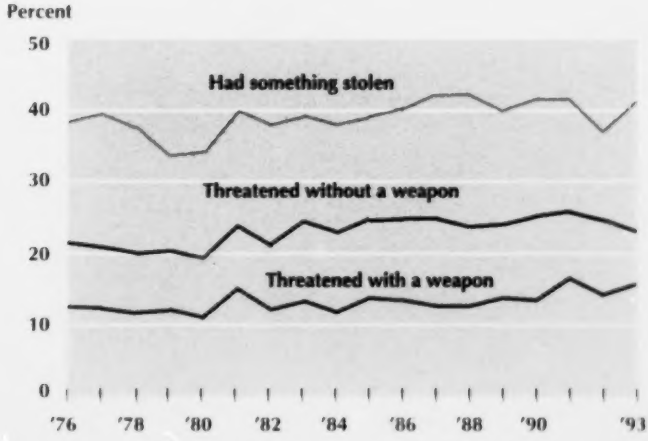
schools' urbanicity, but seniors attending schools with fewer than 400 students were less likely to have been threatened (11 percent) than seniors in larger schools, where 15 to 16 percent had been threatened.[17]

- **Victimization rates of high school seniors have not changed dramatically.**

Despite teachers' perceptions of growing safety problems in the schools, victimization rates of high school seniors changed little between 1976 and 1993, with the exception of a slight increase in the percentages of students who reported being threatened with or without a weapon. The most common type of victimization for high school seniors was having something stolen.[18]

Percentage of high school seniors who reported being victimized at school: 1976–93

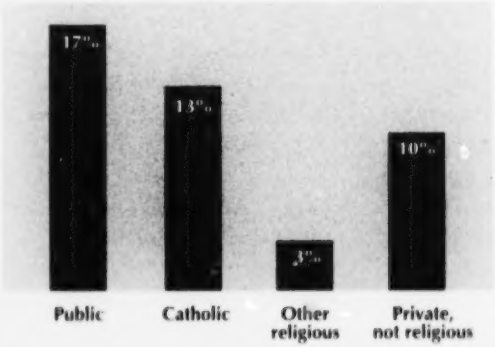


SOURCE: University of Michigan, Survey Research Center, Institute for Social Research, *Monitoring the Future Study*.

- **About one in six high school seniors in 1992 had someone offer to sell them drugs at school during the first half of the school year.**

Because drug-selling activity in a school is often accompanied by increased crime, the number of students reporting that they have been approached at school to buy drugs is indicative of the extent to which the school environment is affected by drug problems. Incidence in 1992 was greatest at public schools and least at private schools with a religious affiliation other than Catholic.[19]

Percentage of high school seniors who reported someone offered to sell them drugs at school: 1992



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, NCES, National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988, Second Follow-up (1992) Student Survey.

Student Readiness to Learn

Classes full of students ready and eager to learn make a teacher's job much easier and more enjoyable. Students who disrupt classes by being late or frequently absent make their teachers' jobs more difficult. Students who use drugs or alcohol can contribute to disruption of class activities and crime in the schools. Also,

students' readiness to learn in English is affected by their ability to speak the language. Unless teachers are trained in teaching English as a second language or in bilingual education, having a large number of children with difficulty speaking English can make a teacher's job much more demanding.

- **The percentage of high school sophomores who came to school unprepared for class decreased between 1980 and 1990.**

The proportion of high school sophomores who reported that they usually or often came to school without completed homework dropped from 22 percent to 18 percent between 1980 and 1990. The percentages who came without books, paper, or pen and pencil also dropped. In both years, there was a relationship between poor performance on reading, vocabulary, and mathematics tests and coming to school unprepared. However, students in the lowest test quartile improved in all three areas.[20]

Percentage of high school sophomores who came to school unprepared in 1980 and 1990

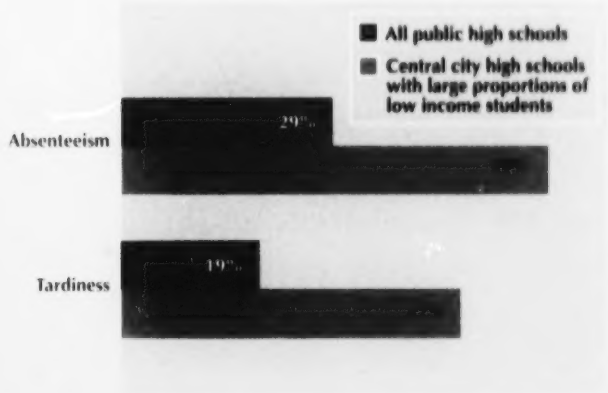
Student behavior and year	Total	Test quartile	
		Lowest	Highest
Come to school without books			
1980	8.5	17.1	3.0
1990	6.3	12.8	2.5
Come to school without paper, pen, or pencil			
1980	15.1	21.9	10.8
1990	10.5	15.1	8.2
Come to school without homework completed			
1980	22.1	28.5	16.2
1990	18.1	23.8	14.3

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, NCES, *America's High School Sophomores: A Ten Year Comparison;* High School and Beyond, Base Year Survey (1980); and National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988, First Follow-up Student Survey (1990).

- **Teachers in many public high schools think that student absenteeism and tardiness are serious problems.**

At the high school level, 29 percent of public school teachers reported that student absenteeism was a serious problem in their school, and 19 percent reported that tardiness was a serious problem. Teachers in central city high schools with relatively large proportions of low income students (more than 40 percent of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches) were particularly likely to think that these were serious problems.

Percentage of teachers who thought absenteeism and tardiness were serious problems: 1993–94



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, NCES, Schools and Staffing Survey, 1993–94 (Teacher and School Questionnaires).

- **Drug use by high school seniors declined dramatically in the 1980s and early 1990s, but marijuana use is on the increase again. Alcohol use has declined, but remains high.**

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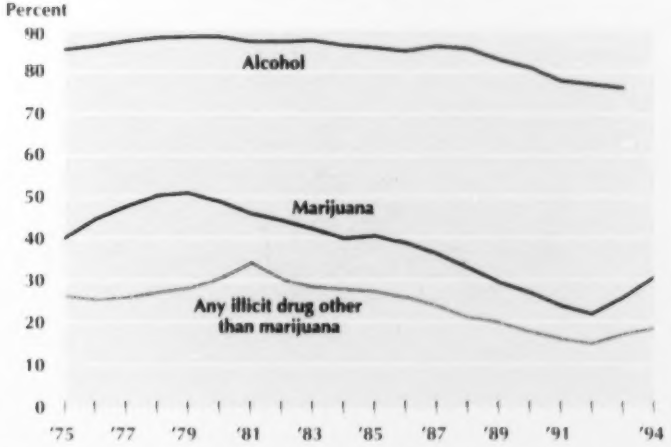
In 1978, one-half of all high school seniors reported using marijuana during the previous year. Reported marijuana use dropped to 22 percent by 1992, but rose to 31 percent in 1994. Use of alcohol also dropped in the 1980s and early 1990s, but not as dramatically as marijuana, and overall use remains high.[21]

Percentage of high school seniors who reported using drugs or alcohol in the previous year



SOURCE: University of Michigan, Survey Research Center, Institute for Social Research, *Monitoring the Future Study*.

Especially disturbing is the fact that 8 percent of high school seniors reported that they had been under the influence of alcohol while at school on at least 1 day during the previous month in 1993, and 9 percent reported that they had been under the influence of marijuana or other illegal drug at school.[22]

- **Increasing numbers of school-age children speak a language other than English at home and speak English with difficulty.**

In 1990, more than 5 percent of all school-age children spoke a language other than English at home and spoke English with difficulty, up from 4 percent in 1980. Thirty-three percent of these children lived in California. In five states (California, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and New York), more than 8 percent of school-age children spoke another language at home and had difficulty speaking English.[23]

Respect for Teachers

The public's level of respect for teachers is likely to affect the attractiveness of the teaching profession and the quality of new teachers. There is wide variation from country to country in the percentage who think that secondary teachers are "very respected" or "fairly well respected" as a profession.

- **Compared to secondary teachers in some other countries, secondary teachers in the United States are accorded a high degree of public respect.**

Among 10 European countries and the United States, an average of 9 percent of persons thought that secondary teachers were "very respected," and another 48 percent thought they were "fairly well respected." In the United States, 20 percent thought they were "very respected," and 48 percent thought they were "fairly well respected."[24]

Summary

Teachers put in more than a 40-hour week, on average, counting time spent outside of school hours. Their average salaries tend to be lower than those of many other professionals, but, adjusting for inflation, teachers' salaries increased substantially during the 1980s. Most teachers are supported in their professional development by their schools and districts. More than four out of five teachers reported that they had a good deal of control over how they taught and evaluated students. They were less likely to report that they had a great deal of control over selecting what they taught and what texts and materials they used, and over disciplining students. Public school teachers are increasingly worried about school safety at both the elementary and secondary levels, although victimization rates reported by high school seniors have not changed dramatically since the 1970s.

In some ways, public school teachers as a group appear to face more difficult working conditions than private school teachers. They have larger classes, on average; are less likely to think that teachers have a good deal of influence over important policies in their schools; and are less likely to think that they have a great deal of control over most classroom practices. They are also more likely to think that absenteeism and tardiness are serious problems in their schools, and public high school seniors are more likely to report that someone offered to sell them drugs at school. However, public school teachers earn substantially more than private school teachers, on average.

Working conditions vary considerably within the public school sector, depending on the school's size and location and the percentage of low income students in the school. For example, central city public schools are more likely than those in other types of communities to have safety problems and higher absentee rates. Teachers in small public schools tend to have smaller classes than those in large schools and are more likely to think that teachers have a good deal of influence over school policies.

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[1]*The Condition of Education 1996*, 150, based on NCES, Schools and Staffing Survey, 1993–94 (Teacher Questionnaire).

[2]Ibid.

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[4]Ibid., 179.

[5]*The Condition of Education 1996*, 297, based on NCES, Schools and Staffing Survey, 1993–94 (Private School and Teacher Demand and Shortage Questionnaires).

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[7]Henke, Robin R., Choy, Susan P., Geis, Sonya, and Broughman, Stephen, *Schools and Staffing in the United States: A Statistical Profile, 1993–94* (NCES 96-124) (Washington, D.C.: NCES, 1996), 14.

[8]*Digest of Education 1995*, 79.

[9]*The Condition of Education 1996*, 296, based on American Federation of Teachers, *Survey and Analysis of Salary Trends 1995*, December 1995, table III-2.

[10]Ibid., 174, based on NCES, National Adult Literacy Survey, 1992.

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[13]Ibid.

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[15]Ibid., 148, based on NCES, Schools and Staffing Survey, 1993–94 (Teacher Questionnaire).

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[17]Ibid., 364, based on NCES, National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988, Second Follow-up (1992) Student Survey.

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[23]*The Condition of Education 1994*, 130, based on U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1990 Census of Population, 1990; CPH-L-98, table ED90-4, "Language Use and English Ability, Persons 5 to 17 Years, by State: 1990"; and 1980 Census of Population, U.S. Summary, PC80-1-C1, table 236 and individual state volumes, PC80-1-0, table 196.

[24]Center for Educational Research and Innovation, *Education at a Glance: OECD Indicators*, 1995, 60.

Other NCES Publications

For more information, see the following NCES publications:

The Condition of Education 1996. Washington, D.C.: 1996 (NCES 96-304)

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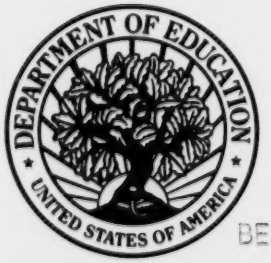

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